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## [Terms & Tools](#)

# Geographical Indications: Terms & Tools

Do you know the difference between Roquefort and blue cheese? Roquefort is produced in a particular geographical area conveying its unique characteristics and reputation. Such quality and/or reputational link is protected as a geographical indication (GI) and allows Roquefort producers to compete in the market against numerous similar and undifferentiated products trading primarily on price. The following text shall serve as an introduction to geographical indications and the available mechanisms to protect them.

## What is a geographical indication?

A geographical indication is a sign used on products with a specific geographical origin whose qualities and/or reputation are attributable to that origin. In order to function as a GI:

- The sign must identify a product as originating in a given place (e.g. Chianti identifying a wine originating in the Italian region Chianti);
- The qualities, characteristics or reputation of the product should be due to the place of origin (the qualities of Chianti are due to the grapes grown in the soil of that specific Italian region).

## How are geographical indications protected?

Protection for a GI is obtained by acquiring a right over the name that constitutes the indication (e.g. Chianti). This right can be a specific right designed for GIs (a sui generis protection of GIs) which, depending on the different jurisdiction, may be called a protected GI, a denomination of origin (DO) or an appellation of origin (AO). In many countries, a right to the indication can also be acquired, in application of the relevant trade mark law, through the registration of a collective trade mark and/or a certification mark. While collective trade marks and certification marks are generally protected for renewable ten-year periods, protected GIs are not subject to a specific period of validity. This means that the protection will remain valid unless the GI registration is cancelled.

## AO, DO, PGI, PDO... What do these abbreviations stand for?

Appellations of origin (AOs) and denominations of origin (DOs) are special kinds of geographical indications generally implying a stronger link with the place of origin (e.g. the quality and characteristics of a product protected as an AO and a DO must generally result exclusively or essentially from its geographical origin).

Protected geographical indications (PGIs) identify products whose quality or reputation is linked to the place or region where it is produced, processed or prepared, although the ingredients used need not necessarily come from that geographical area. All PGI products must also adhere to a precise set

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of specifications and may bear the PGI logo. Therefore, products bearing the PGI logo have a specific characteristic or reputation associating them with a given place and at least one stage in the production process must be carried out in that area, while the raw materials used in production may come from another region.

Protected designations of origin (PDOs) identify products that are produced, processed and prepared in a specific geographical area, using the recognised know-how of local producers and ingredients from the region concerned. These are products whose characteristics are strictly linked to their geographical origin and they must adhere to a precise set of specifications and may bear the PDO logo. Therefore, products bearing the PDO logo have proven characteristics resulting solely from the terrain and abilities of producers in the region of production with which they are associated. PDO products thus require all stages of the food production process to be carried out in the area concerned. There must be an objective and close link between the product's features and its geographical origin.

## Searching geographical indications

Geographical names are commonly used in business to describe and promote the features of products or services offered in the marketplace. Indeed, many products display a reference to a geographical origin in their trade mark or packaging. Since such use can conflict with a registered geographical indication and in order to avoid any conflict, several online databases are available to find out if a geographical indication is protected in a certain territory.

### At national level...

Some national Intellectual Property Offices (IPOs) provide databases including a list of geographical indications that are protected within the national territory. Therefore, if you want to perform a search at national level, you can contact the relevant IPO, which may (or may not) offer a searchable database of registered GIs. A directory of IP offices is available on the [WIPO website](#).

### At European Union level...

A list of nearly 3,400 EU registered GIs can be accessed via four databases maintained by the European Commission:

- [DOOR](#) for foodstuffs
- [E-BACCHUS](#) for wines
- [E-SPIRIT-DRINKS](#) for spirits
- [The file of Aromatised Wines](#)

### At international level...

You can consult [WIPO's LISBON EXPRESS](#) to search GIs protected under the Lisbon System.

## GI enforcement

When a GI product is counterfeited in the EU, there are a wide range of actions that can be taken. In general, civil and/or penal actions are possible. However, procedure and sanctions vary from one member state to the other. Furthermore, one effective tool against counterfeiting offered by European

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legislation is represented by the EU customs actions, enabling right holders to request customs authorities to prevent the entry into European Union Member States of goods infringing their intellectual property rights (including GIs). In particular, customs authorities can seize products that seem to violate GI rules and can keep them in custody and destroy them, provided that the owner or the declarant of the seized goods does not oppose the destruction within ten working days from the notification of the seizure (3 days for perishable goods).

Would you like to know more about geographical indications? Check out our [Bulletin issue 22](#) which has been entirely dedicated to the topic.

**For further information, see also:**

[European IPR Helpdesk Factsheet "The value of geographical indications for businesses"](#)

[The EUIPO website](#)

[The WIPO website](#)

[The website of the Organization for an international Geographical Indications Network \(OriGIN\)](#)

- [Geographical Indications](#)

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